

Ion Tănăsescu – a surgeon for eternity. 150 years since his birth (1875–1954).

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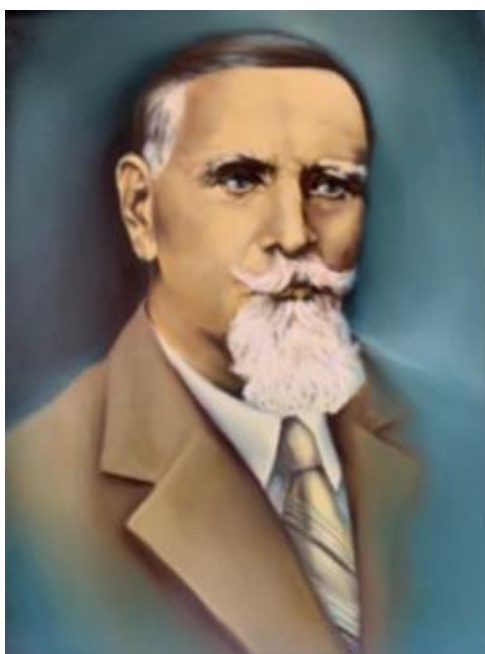
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Abstract. Ioan Tănăsescu (1875–1954) was one of the most influential Romanian surgeons and anatomists of the early twentieth century, whose academic, clinical, and organizational contributions shaped modern surgical education in Iași and beyond. Trained in Romania and extensively refined through international study in Paris, Vienna, London, and other major European centers, he combined rigorous anatomical knowledge with exemplary surgical technique. As professor, clinic director, dean, rector, and senator, Tănăsescu played a decisive role in the development of surgical infrastructure, notably the Palace of the Surgical Clinics at “Sf. Spiridon” Hospital. His legacy endures through his scientific work, his students, and the institutional foundations he established, securing him a lasting place in the history of Romanian and European surgery.

Ion Tănăsescu was born on September 1, 1875, in Fălticeni, into a modest family, the first to settle “in town” after generations of peasants working the land and shepherds driving their flocks across the Stânișoara hills..



His parents, Gheorghe and Sultana A. Tănăsoaie, opened an inn on the outskirts of Fălticeni, on the road coming from southern Moldavia toward Putna Monastery. Travelers could stay overnight in the inn’s courtyard and a guest room, while the other two rooms—the bedroom and kitchen—were reserved for the family, which was particularly large, numbering twelve children. With perseverance, the parents sent all their children to schools, high schools, and universities. Thus, the four sons pursued intellectual careers: the eldest, Ioan Tănăsescu, became a surgeon and university professor in Iași; Constantin Tănăsescu became a senior physician in Iași and later in Bucharest; Vasile

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Tănăsescu became a notary and director of the RMS in Bacău; and Teodor Tănăsescu became a jurist and magistrate at the High Court of Cassation in Bucharest. The eight daughters, married in Iași, Fălticeni, Suceava, and Bucharest, also attended various schools.

The future professor Ion Tănăsescu completed primary school and the first years of high school in Fălticeni, then moved to Iași, where he graduated from the “United Institutes,” obtaining his baccalaureate in 1896. That same year, he enrolled in the Faculty of Medicine in Iași, where he studied with great diligence, while simultaneously engaging in medical and teaching activities as his qualifications allowed: provisional extern at the Medical Clinic of “Sf. Spiridon” Hospital (May 1898); competitive extern at the Surgical Service, ranked first (November 1898); intern in the Surgical Service (1899); assistant in the Laboratory of Descriptive Anatomy (October 1899); intern in the Medical Clinic (1900).

In 1902, he graduated and obtained the title of Doctor of Medicine and Surgery after defending his thesis *General Considerations on Hydrocele and Its Treatment*. He completed his military service with the 7th Cavalry Regiment and became a reserve captain in July 1904.

On May 26, 1904, he was accepted into the laboratory of Professor Poirier at the Faculty of Medicine in Paris, where he worked until 1906. His assiduous work in the anatomy laboratory of the renowned French professor quickly brought him recognition, and he was entrusted with preparing dissection specimens used for teaching demonstrations. In Paris, he attended most hospitals, with extended training in the surgical departments of Professors Terrier, Poirier, Le Dentu, and Tuffier.

His research at the Paris Institute of Anatomy resulted in remarkable publications during this period, including *The Study of the Arteries of the Sympathetic System*, based on the analysis of 140 dissection specimens, and *The Study of the Lymphatics of the Joints*. These works were distinguished by meticulous observation, systematic approach, and clarity of presentation—qualities that would define his entire professional career. At the end of his

activity in the Anatomy Laboratory, Professor Poirier certified his talent and results, stating: “*Throughout my career, I have encountered few students as gifted as Mr. Tănăsescu.*”

From his student years onward, he consistently sought to remain informed about surgical advances in developed countries, to compare experiences with other services, and to refine his training by visiting medical faculties and hospitals abroad. In 1898, he attended the service of Dr. Neumann and the Anatomy Institute of Professor Zuckerkandl in Vienna. In 1899, he visited hospitals in Odessa and the Anatomy Institute in Berlin. In France, he visited the anatomy institutes in Nancy and Bordeaux.

After returning to Romania, he continued his study visits in 1907 to the anatomy institutes in Brussels, Liège, Budapest, and Cambridge. In 1908, he spent a month learning the organization of anatomical education at St. Thomas’ Hospital and the London Hospital. In London, he also attended the great anatomical museum of the Association of Surgeons, admiring preparations by Darwin, Hunter, Struthers, and others. Year after year, he visited hospitals and surgical clinics in Paris, Strasbourg, Antwerp, Frankfurt, and Berlin.

From 1907, he was appointed assistant at the Surgical Clinic led by Leon Sculy at “Sf. Spiridon” Hospital in Iași. After passing the docent examination, he became associate professor at the Chair of Anatomy, and on February 19, 1913, full professor at the same chair.

Following the departure of Professor Ernest Juvara to Bucharest in 1912, he was appointed professor of Topographic Anatomy and Surgical Clinic. In 1913, after the division of this chair, he remained professor of the Second Surgical Clinic, which later became the First Surgical Clinic, a position he held until his retirement in 1940 (Fig.1).

In 1933, through tireless efforts, he succeeded in completing the new and modern Palace of the Surgical Clinics at “Sf. Spiridon” Hospital, which housed the Second Semiological Surgical Clinic, at that time one of the most modern surgical clinics in Romania (Fig.2)..



Fig. 1. Ion Tănăsescu and colleagues from the Surgical Clinic Service of "Sf. Spiridon" Hospital, Iași



Fig. 2. The Palace of the Surgical Clinics in Iași

He served as head of the Epitropy of "Sf. Spiridon" Hospitals between 1928–1931 and in 1920, proving to be one of its most capable administrators. During a difficult period, he managed to build the most beautiful and best-equipped surgical clinic in Southeastern Europe, completed in 1933. In 1941, after his retirement, the hospital administration decided to name one of the operating rooms after him.

Beyond his exemplary work as professor and surgeon, Ioan Tănăsescu was an outstanding organizer. He served as dean of the Faculty of Medicine in Iași from 1930 to 1935 and was elected rector of the University of Iași in 1938. At the same time, he was active in social and

political life as a senator (Fig. 3).. Despite his numerous responsibilities, his work ethic and sense of duty led to exemplary professional conduct. He arrived at the clinic early in the morning, following a well-established schedule that included patient rounds, operating room activity, and lectures.



Fig. 3. Senator Ion Tănăsescu at the podium during a public assembly

His anatomy lectures—traditionally considered a dry discipline—were concise, clear, and logically structured, constantly related to pathology or surgical technique, making them vivid and engaging. As a professor of surgical clinic, his patient examinations were models of classical didactic mastery. His logical diagnostic reasoning left no doubt regarding the diagnosis.

Professor Tănăsescu cared deeply for his patients. Beneath an apparently distant demeanor lay profound sensitivity and respect. His solid anatomical training was evident especially in the operating room, where his surgical technique was systematic, precise, and devoid of theatrical gestures. His surgical skill was particularly notable in operations for uterine cancer, oncologic lymphadenectomies, biliary tract surgery, and thyroidectomies.

The results of his prodigious activity were reflected in numerous scientific papers, communications, and reports presented annually at national and international congresses.

In recognition of his scientific and didactic achievements, he was elected to numerous academic societies in Romania and abroad, including the Romanian Academy, the Surgical Society of Paris, the French Academy of Surgery, and the International Society of Surgery. Even after his retirement in 1940, he continued to work as a hospital surgeon during the war years.

For his contributions, he received the Centenary Medal of King Carol I in 1940 and the Order of the Cross of Queen Maria, First Class, in 1941 (Fig. 4).

Demanding of himself and his collaborators, a sober and upright spirit, Professor Ion Tănăsescu created a renowned school of anatomy and surgery, whose disciples became distinguished figures: I. Nubert, I. Iancu, I. Repciuc și N. Barbilian) and a great school of surgery: Vladimir Buțureanu (Fig 5), Nicolae Costinescu, Vasile Dobrovici.

His passion for surgery extended within his family, with his son and grandson also becoming eminent surgeons and professors in Iași.



Fig. 4. The medal and order awarded to Prof. Ion Tănăsescu by the Royal House of Romania

After the war, retired, he moved to Bucharest, where he remained professionally active despite difficulties with the newly installed communist regime. In 1952, he was appointed senior physician at Panduri Hospital

He passed away on January 25, 1954, in Bucharest. Fifty years after his death, the clinic where he worked was named Tănăsescu–Buțureanu, honoring two titans of Iași surgery.



Fig. 5. The two great professors – I. Tănăsescu and Vl. Buțureanu, founders of the First Surgical Clinic in Iași.

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